



Diplomats tour shrimp factories accused of child labor

Minister of Foreign Affairs Surapong Tovichakchaikul led diplomats from 11 countries on a tour of two shrimp processing factories to dispel accusations by some nongovernmental organizations media that they are involved in human trafficking and child labor. The companies strenuously denied the charges and allowed diplomats from the Americas and Europe to inspect their workplaces and labor practices.

Surapong, who is also a Deputy Prime Minister, said he wants the international community and consumers to “have correct information and be assured that Thai shrimps are certainly not produced using child labor and [the companies] are not involved with human trafficking.”

The January 16 tour visited the Royal Thai Frozen Food factory and the Long Sor Somphon shrimp-peeling factory in Samut Sakhon province adjacent to Bangkok, and the Operations Center of the Royal Thai Police. Reports from some nongovernmental organizations and international media last year accused Long Sor Somphon of hiring migrant workers from Myanmar who are victims of human trafficking, and engaging in a variety of labor rights abuses including child labor and forced labor. Royal Thai Frozen Food was alleged to have known about the violations when sourcing raw materials from Long Sor Somphon.

On the inspection tour, Minister Surapong was accompanied by Minister of Labor Phadermchai Sasomsub, Minister of Social Development and Human Security Santi Promphat, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives Siriwat Kajornprasart and Vice Minister of Labor Anusorn Kraiwatnussorn.

Thailand is on the Human Trafficking Tier 2 Watch List of the United States’ Trafficking in Persons Report, which is the next-to-lowest ranking. Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and U.S. President Barack Obama discussed the issue of human trafficking during the president’s visit to Thailand in November 2012. Thailand is implementing a plan of action to combat this transnational crime. Prime Minister Yingluck assigned Foreign Minister Surapong to follow up on the progress various government agencies are making on the plan.

The minister has also coordinated with the private sector to find solutions to the problems of trafficking and labor. After meeting with Minister Surapong, the Frozen Foods Association announced that its member companies are ready and willing to allow foreign embassies to inspect their factories and practices. The government will establish a mechanism for relaying inspection requests from the embassies to the association.

In another example of how seriously Thailand is taking the problem of human trafficking, the commander of the Royal Thai Army, General Prayuth Chan-ocha has ordered an investigation of two army officers allegedly involved in the trafficking of over 850 Rohingya from Myanmar. The officers are attached to the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) in the Deep South. "These bad apples must be punished and got rid of," General Prayuth said.